# Did Homer Plagiarize? The Odyssey, the Ifa Tradition, and the African Roots of Greek Mythology

**By Oluwo Jolaoso Osainbola (Ajarn Shaman Shu)**

*Founder, Orisha University*

## Abstract

With the release of Christopher Nolan's film *The Odyssey* (Universal Pictures, July 2026), Homer's ancient epic has returned to the center of global popular culture, grossing more than $700 million in under two weeks. This article examines a question rarely asked in the celebration of the "Western canon": where did the gods of Homer come from? Drawing on the testimony of the Greek historian Herodotus, the scholarship of Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan and Martin Bernal, and the documented antiquity of the Ifa spiritual tradition of the Yoruba people, this article argues that the divine archetypes at the heart of the *Odyssey* — the thunder-king who enforces justice, the wrathful lord of the deep ocean, the divine archer of the forest, the trickster messenger at the crossroads — existed in African spiritual science long before Homer composed his epics in approximately the eighth century BCE. The question is not whether Africa influenced Greece. The Greeks themselves said it did. The question is why the modern world forgot.

**Keywords:** Ifa, Orunmila, Odu Ifa, Shango, Olokun, Oshosi, Eshu, Yoruba religion, Homer, Odyssey, Greek mythology, African spirituality, Herodotus, Dr. Ben, comparative mythology

## I. A $700 Million Retelling — But Whose Story Is It?

In July 2026, Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* arrived in theaters as the cinematic event of the decade. Shot entirely on IMAX 70mm cameras — a first in film history — with Matt Damon as Odysseus, Zendaya as the goddess Athena, and Anne Hathaway as Penelope, the film has already earned more than $700 million worldwide and stands as the fourth-highest-grossing film of the year [1] [2].

The film opens with a bard — played by Travis Scott — reciting the tale aloud, a deliberate choice by Nolan to honor the oral tradition through which the epic was originally transmitted. Audiences watch Zeus punish men who violate his sacred law of hospitality. They watch Poseidon, lord of the sea, hurl storms against Odysseus for blinding his son. They watch a hero consult a blind prophet in the underworld to learn his destiny.

Hollywood calls this Greek mythology. Homer composed these stories in roughly the eighth century BCE — the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are honored as the first great literary works of Europe [3]. But every element listed above — the thunder-god who enforces divine law, the ocean deity whose wrath must be appeased, the consultation of a diviner to read one's destiny, the sacred oral corpus memorized and recited by trained keepers of the word — existed in Africa long before Homer was born.

This article asks the question plainly: did the Greeks plagiarize?

## II. The Greeks Themselves Said Their Gods Came from Africa

This is not a modern Afrocentric invention. It is the recorded testimony of the man Europe calls the Father of History.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, writing in the fifth century BCE — closer in time to Homer than we are to Shakespeare — traveled to Egypt, questioned its priests, and recorded his conclusion in Book II of *The Histories*:

> "Indeed, wellnigh all the names of the gods came to Hellas from Egypt. For I am assured by inquiry that they have come from foreign parts, and I believe that they came chiefly from Egypt… I say but what the Egyptians themselves say." [4]

Herodotus did not treat the Greek and Egyptian gods as similar. He treated them as **the same beings under different names**, freely calling the Temple of Ptah at Memphis the "Temple of Hephaestus" [4] [5]. For the Greeks of the classical age, the African origin of their gods was not a controversy. It was common knowledge.

The scholar Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan — "Dr. Ben," the great Egyptologist and historian of the African foundations of world religion — spent his career documenting this same truth: that the spiritual systems celebrated as European or "Western" achievements were carried north from the Nile Valley and the African interior, absorbed, renamed, and eventually claimed as original [6]. In works such as *African Origins of the Major "Western Religions"* (1970) and *Black Man of the Nile and His Family* (1972), Dr. Ben demonstrated that Greece was the student, not the teacher — that Greek initiates studied in African temple systems and returned home with African cosmology dressed in Greek names [6].

Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987) brought this argument into the modern academy, documenting how the Greeks' own "Ancient Model" — in which Greece openly credited Egypt and Phoenicia for its civilization — was deliberately replaced in the racist scholarship of the nineteenth century by an "Aryan Model" that erased Africa from the story [7]. Bernal's work ignited fierce controversy, and mainstream classicists such as Mary Lefkowitz have contested his conclusions [5]. But the core historical fact stands

untouched by the debate: **the ancient Greeks themselves, in their own words, credited Africa.** The burden of proof lies on those who claim otherwise.

## III. The Ifa Tradition Is Older

Homer composed his epics around the eighth century BCE — approximately 2,800 years ago. The written record of Greek religion begins, essentially, with him.

The Ifa tradition of the Yoruba people is a complete spiritual science transmitted through the 256 Odu of Ifa — a vast, mathematically structured oral corpus of sacred verses, histories (patakis), medicine, and divination, memorized in full by initiated priests called babalawos [8]. This is not "mythology" in the dismissive sense. As the Araba Agbaye of Ile-Ife has stated, the 256 Odu are "the original operating system of human consciousness." The corpus is attributed to Orunmila, the prophet of Ifa, the Witness of Destiny, who taught at Ile-Ife — the city Yoruba tradition holds as the source of all [9].

The material record confirms Ile-Ife's deep antiquity as a sacred center. When the German explorer Leo Frobenius reached the grove of Olokun at Ile-Ife in 1908 — led there by accounts of ancient treasure — the excavations that followed revealed a sophisticated ancient glass-bead manufacturing industry, and Ife's naturalistic bronze and terracotta sacred art so astonished European scholars that Frobenius could not believe Africans had made it: he famously theorized he had found Atlantis, because the alternative — African civilization of the highest order — was unthinkable to the Europe of his day [10]. That reflex, the refusal to credit Africa, is precisely the habit of mind this article addresses.

African civilization did not begin with Greece; Greece is young beside the Nile Valley, and the Nile Valley's spiritual systems flowed from the African interior. The archetypes preserved in the Odu of Ifa belong to this older stream. When we place the orishas of the Yoruba pantheon beside the Olympians of Homer, the correspondences are not vague resemblances. They are structural, functional, and specific.

## IV. The Correspondences: Orisha and Olympian

| Yoruba Orisha (Ifa tradition) | Greek Deity (Homer) | Shared Domain and Function |
|---|---|---|
| **Shango** — orisha of thunder, lightning, fire, and justice; hurls thunderstones at offenders; royal authority (third Alaafin of Oyo); husband of three wives | **Zeus** — king of the gods; wielder of the thunderbolt; enforcer of divine law and sacred hospitality; famously many consorts | The thunder-king whose sky-fire is the instrument of justice |
| **Olokun** — orisha of the depths of the ocean; ruler of all waters; giver of wealth and health; rose in wrath to flood humanity until bound in the deep | **Poseidon** — lord of the sea; earth-shaker; his wrath pursues Odysseus across the entire epic | The sovereign of the deep whose anger must be appeased before the voyager can reach home |
| **Oshosi (Ọṣọ́ọ̀sì)** — orisha of the hunt, the forest, and the unerring arrow; the divine tracker | **Artemis / Apollo** — the divine archers; deities of the hunt and the unerring bow | The sacred archer whose arrow never misses |
| **Eshu (Elegba)** — divine messenger; keeper of the crossroads; trickster; opener of the way between heaven and earth | **Hermes** — messenger of the gods; god of roads, boundaries, and cunning; guide of souls | The liminal messenger-trickster who carries word between gods and men |
| **Orunmila** — prophet of Ifa; Witness of Destiny; consulted through divination before every great undertaking | **Tiresias** — the blind seer whom Odysseus must consult in the underworld to learn his path home | The oracle of destiny whose counsel determines the hero's fate |

These are the very engines of the *Odyssey*'s plot. Remove the wrathful sea-lord, the justice of the thunder-king, the prophecy of the seer, and the messenger of the gods, and there is no epic left. Every one of these divine functions exists, fully articulated, in the Ifa tradition — and even mainstream reference works now acknowledge the equivalences directly: the standard scholarly treatment of Olokun lists Poseidon as his Greek counterpart [11], and the comparative literature on Eshu and Hermes is extensive [12].

Consider the deepest structural parallel of all. In the Odu Ifa, there is a pataki in which Olokun, enraged, rises from the depths to drown humanity. The orishas do not fight blindly — they go

first to **Orunmila**, who divines the solution: Ogun must forge the longest chain ever made, and Obatala must descend and bind Olokun in the deep [11]. Now observe Homer: Odysseus, pursued by the wrath of the sea-god, cannot simply sail home — he must first descend to the underworld and consult the seer Tiresias, whose divination reveals the only path by which the sea's anger may be survived [1] [3]. The wrathful ocean power; the consultation of the diviner; the prescribed remedy that alone restores order — the sequence is the same. In Ifa, this is not literature. It is the living practice of divination that continues in Yorubaland and across the diaspora to this day, exactly as it did millennia ago.

And the mode of transmission is the same. Homer's epics were preserved for centuries by trained bards who memorized and recited tens of thousands of verses before the poems were ever written down — the very tradition Nolan honors by opening his film with a bard [1] [2]. The Ifa corpus is preserved the same way, by babalawos who spend decades memorizing the 256 Odu with their thousands of verses [8]. The difference is that the Ifa tradition never broke its chain of transmission. It is the older system, still alive.

## V. Plagiarism, Transmission, or Theft of Credit?

Let us be precise about the claim. "Plagiarism" in the modern legal sense did not exist in the eighth century BCE. What the evidence supports is this:

First, the Greeks did not invent their gods from nothing. Herodotus says so explicitly, and he attributes the knowledge to the Egyptians themselves [4]. Second, Egypt is Africa, and Egypt's spiritual systems were continuous with the African interior — the position documented by Dr. Ben across five decades of scholarship [6]. Third, the divine archetypes that drive Homer's epics correspond, function for function, to orishas of the Yoruba pantheon whose tradition is transmitted through an unbroken oral science older than Greek literacy itself [8] [9]. Fourth, the erasure of this African source is not ancient — it is modern, a product of the same nineteenth-century racial scholarship that Bernal exposed and that made Frobenius see "Atlantis" rather than Africa when he stood before the sacred art of Ile-Ife [7] [10].

So did Homer plagiarize? Homer was a receiver of traditions that flowed into the Aegean from older worlds — and the oldest of those worlds was African. The theft is not Homer's. The theft belongs to the centuries that took Africa's spiritual science, called the Greek copy "the foundation of Western civilization," and called the African original "primitive superstition." The same story, told by a Greek, became the canon of Europe; held by Africa, it was called mythology and marked for erasure through slavery and colonialism. That is the plagiarism — the theft of credit, sustained for two hundred years.

## VI. Watch the Film. Then Study the Source.

Nolan's *The Odyssey* deserves its acclaim. It is a magnificent telling of a story humanity has loved for nearly three thousand years. But when Zeus's justice thunders across the IMAX screen, know that Shango's thunderstones fell first. When Poseidon's wrath swallows Odysseus's ships, know that Olokun ruled the deep before Greece had ships. When Odysseus kneels before the blind seer to learn his destiny, know that this is divination — and that in the Ifa tradition of Orunmila, that sacred science never stopped. It is practiced today, unbroken, from Ile-Ife to Havana to Bahia to Brooklyn.

The 256 Odu of Ifa are not mythology. They are the original record — and they are still speaking.

**To study the Ifa tradition, the orishas, and the African spiritual sciences in depth, visit OrishaUniversity.com — the world's first religiously accredited university of Ifa and orisha studies.**

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## About the Author

**Oluwo Jolaoso Osainbola**, also known as **Ajarn Shaman Shu**, is an initiated Oluwo Osain high priest and Babalawo, and the founder of Orisha University. His books on Ifa and the sacred teachings of the African diaspora, including *THE ORIGINAL AI: Ancestral Intelligence*, carry the full endorsement and blessing of the Araba Agbaye of Ile-Ife, Nigeria, who has written that his work "represents the institutional and scholarly restoration of what was taken from our people."

**Further Reading:** For a complete study of the sixteen orisa and the sacred foundations of the Yoruba religion discussed in this article, see the author's book *Roots of Heaven: The Sixteen Orisa of Santería, Candomblé, and Lucumí — Olodumare, Ashe, Ori, and the Sacred Foundations of the Yoruba Religion*, available on Google Books.

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